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ABSTRACT

Based on the view that the first weeks of school lay the foundation for the remainder of the year, this book uses an ethnographic approach to present the story of one teacher and the classroom she constructed during the first weeks of school. The book's introduction explores beliefs about children and teaching and a view of theory and practice focused on building student empowerment. Chapter 1, "Before School Begins: Planning for the Year," advocates reflecting on past systems and procedures and organizing the environment to encourage independent work. This chapter also describes classroom learning areas, and examines community as part of the curriculum. Chapter 2, "The First Day: Creating Community," presents a variety of first day experiences, identifies lessons learned, and asserts that comfort, conversation, empowerment, expectations, and sharing are vital elements in the beginning of a school community. Chapter 3, "The First Weeks of School: Getting Down to Work," discusses the process of creating a predictable daily schedule that guides teachers and children throughout the year, and includes a typical daily schedule, "givens" or requirements, and goals and standards. Chapter 4, "The First Weeks of School: Learning about Quality," examines beginning work assignments, introducing the concept of quality, building a quality community, and using systems theory and choice theory. Chapter 5, "Roadblocks, Yes Buts, and Challenges for the Future," addresses barriers to implementing a child-centered classroom and challenges teachers to take modest steps to begin the change process. Throughout the book, vignettes of children at work and play are supplemented by commentary highlighting the theoretical perspectives involved. The book concludes with a list of 112 professional resources and 37 children's books. (KB)

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